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FROM: GENERAL WHEELER, CJCS
TO : GENERAL WESTMORELAND, COMUSMACV
INFO: ADMIRAL SHARP, CINCPAC

12 FEBRUARY 1968

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DECLASSIFIED

Authority *JCS letter 10-10-78*
By *10/19* *10/19* Date *7-22-88*

REF: MAC 01858

1. AT A MEETING AT THE WHITE HOUSE THIS AFTERNOON ATTENDED BY SECY RUSK, SECY MCNAMARA, MR. HELMS, GENERAL MAX TAYLOR, MR. CLARK CLIFFORD, WALT ROSTOW AND MYSELF THERE WAS MUCH DISCUSSION OF THE REFERENCED MESSAGE. THE CRITICAL QUESTION ADDRESSED CENTERED AROUND PARAGRAPH 9 OF THE REFERENCE WHICH LEADS OFF THAT YOU WOULD WELCOME REINFORCEMENTS AT ANY TIME THEY CAN BE MADE AVAILABLE AND STATED THE PURPOSES TO WHICH YOU WOULD PUT THESE FORCES. SPECIFICALLY, YOUR MESSAGE IS INTERPRETED HERE AS EXPRESSING THE FOLLOWING:

A. YOU COULD USE ADDITIONAL U.S. TROOP UNITS, BUT YOU ARE NOT EXPRESSING A FIRM DEMAND FOR THEM; IN SUM, YOU DO NOT FEAR DEFEAT IF YOU ARE NOT REINFORCED.

B. YOU ARE CONCERNED AS TO THE POSSIBLE STATUS OF THE ARVN AS A RESULT OF RECENT COMBAT ACTIONS.

C. YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE RELIABILITY OF YOUR LOGISTIC SYSTEM INTO NORTHERN I CORPS TACTICAL ZONE AND BELIEVE THAT YOU MUST CONTROL AND USE HIGHWAY 1 THROUGH THE AI VAN PASS.

D. ADDITIONAL FORCES WOULD GIVE YOU INCREASED CAPABILITY TO REGAIN THE INITIATIVE AND GO ON THE OFFENSIVE AT AN APPROPRIATE TIME.

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2. CONSIDERABLE DISCUSSION OF THE SITUATION CENTERED ABOUT THE CHANGE IN ENEMY STRATEGY, ITS EFFECT, AND WHY THE CHANGE WAS INSTITUTED. THE QUESTION AROSE AS TO WHETHER OR NOT WE TOO SHOULD NOT CHANGE OUR STRATEGY. FOR EXAMPLE, ONE CONFEREES STATED THAT PRIORITY 1 SHOULD BE TO CLEAR THE CITIES; PRIORITY 2, GIVE AWAY NO TERRITORY OF VALUE BUT AVOID COMBAT WITH THE ENEMY IN TERRAIN AND WEATHER FAVORING HIM. YOU WILL PERCEIVE THE THOUGHT IN PRIORITY 2 THAT PERHAPS WE ARE MAKING A MISTAKE BY ATTEMPTING TO HOLD THE KHE SAMH AREA AND PERHAPS SHOULD CONCENTRATE OUR DEFENSES FURTHER TO THE EAST. A FURTHER THOUGHT CITED BY THE SAME CONFEREES CONCERNED THE DESIRABILITY OF USING U.S. TROOPS NOW IN THE DELTA AS YOUR RESERVE, LEAVING IV CORPS OPERATIONS TO THE ARVN.

3. I WILL TELEPHONE YOU AT THE USUAL TIME TOMORROW. I WOULD PARTICULARLY APPRECIATE HAVING YOUR VIEWS AT THAT TIME REGARDING THE CONTENT OF PARAGRAPH 1 OF THIS MESSAGE. MOREOVER, I WOULD APPRECIATE HAVING YOUR VIEWS BY RETURN MESSAGE ON ALL OF THE QUESTIONS RAISED IN THIS MESSAGE.

4. FYI: I AM CONSIDERING A TRIP TO VISIT WITH YOU SOMETIME IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS IN ORDER TO OBTAIN AT FIRSTHAND YOUR THOUGHTS AS TO THE SITUATION AND CORRECTIVE MEASURES NEEDED. IF THE TRIP COMES OFF, I WILL QUITE PROBABLY STOP IN HAWAII EN ROUTE TO SOUTH VIETNAM FOR ABOUT A HALF DAY TO TALK THINGS OVER WITH YOU, OLEY. WARM REGARDS TO YOU BOTH.

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ANNOTATED DRAFT FOLLOWS

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EYES ONLY

OK
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~~SECRET~~ - CABLE - EYES ONLY - IMMEDIATE

FM GEN EARLE G. WHEELER, CJCS
TO GEN W. C. WESTMORELAND, COMUSMACV
INFO: ADM U.S.G. SHARP, CINCPAC

DELIVER SOONEST DURING WAKING HOURS

REF: MAC 01858

1. At a meeting at the White House this afternoon attended by Secy Rusk, Secy McNamara, Mr. Helms, General Max Taylor, Mr. Clark Clifford, Walt Rostow and myself there was ~~very~~ much discussion of the referenced message. The critical question addressed centered around paragraph 9 of the reference which leads off that you would welcome reinforcements at any time they can be made available and stated the purposes to which you would put these forces. Specifically, your message is interpreted here as expressing the following:

- a. You could use additional U.S. troop units, but you are not expressing a firm demand for them; ^{in sum,} ~~you~~ you do not fear defeat if you are not reinforced.
- b. You are concerned as to the possible status of the ARVN as a result of recent combat actions.
- c. You are concerned about the reliability of your logistic system into northern I Corps Tactical Zone and believe that you must control and use Highway 1 through the Ai Van Pass.
- d. Additional forces would give you increased capability to regain the initiative and go on the offensive at an appropriate time.

EYES ONLY

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2. ~~There was~~ Considerable discussion of the situation centered about the change in enemy strategy, its effect, and why the change was instituted. The question arose as to whether or not we too should not change our strategy. For example, one conferee stated that priority 1 should be to clear the cities; priority 2, give away no territory of value but avoid combat with the enemy in terrain and weather favoring him. You will perceiveth thought in priority 2 that perhaps we are making a mistake by attempting to hold the Khe Sanh area and perhaps should concentrate our defenses further to the east. A further thought cited by the same conferee concerned the desirability of using U.S. troops now in the Delta as your reserve, leaving IV Corps operations to the ARVN.

3. I will telephone you at the usual time tomorrow. I would particularly appreciate having your views at that time ~~regarding~~ ^{regarding} to the content of paragraph 1 of this message. Moreover, I would appreciate having your views by return message on all of the questions raised in this message.

4. FYI: I am considering a trip to visit with you sometime in the next few days in order to obtain at firsthand your thoughts as to the situation and corrective measures needed. If the trip comes off, I will quite probably stop in Hawaii en route to South Vietnam for about a half day to talk things over with you, Oley. Warm regards to you both.

~~SECRET~~

~~EYES ONLY~~